



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Northern Forest Habitat Conservation
Laws of Minnesota 2020 Final Report

General Information

Date: 02/07/2022

Project Title: Northern Forest Habitat Conservation

Funds Recommended: \$4,205,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2020, Ch. 104, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd 3(c)

Appropriation Language: \$4,205,000 the second year is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with Minnesota Land Trust to acquire forest land in fee to be permanently protected and managed by St. Louis County as county forest lands. A list of proposed land acquisitions must be provided as part of the required accomplishment plan.

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Kris Larson

Title: Executive Director

Organization: Minnesota Land Trust

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Location Information

County Location(s): St. Louis.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Northern Forest

Activity types:

- Protect in Fee

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Forest

Narrative

Summary of Accomplishments

The Minnesota Land Trust acquired a total of 4,373 acres of forest from PotlatchDeltic Corporation in February 2021 and conveyed all of these acres immediately to St. Louis County Land and Minerals Department for long-term management. All lands will be open to public hunting and fishing.

Process & Methods

St. Louis County lies at the center of Minnesota's iconic northern forest landscape. Northern forests provide high quality wildlife habitat, clean water, sustainable forestry products and recreational opportunities because of the large, contiguous, publicly accessible lands. The restructuring of the global timber industry has put Minnesota's forest lands at risk as industrial owners divest land assets. The Minnesota Forest Resources Council identified parcelization of these lands as the primary threat to the ecological and economic health of Minnesota's forests. To ensure healthy game and non-game wildlife populations and to maintain historic public access points for hunting and fishing for future generations, the integrity of large forest tracks must be preserved.

Goals and Scope of Work:

The goal of this program was to ensure long term sustainability of game species and Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) including moose, spruce grouse, northern long-eared bat, and Canada lynx in St. Louis County by acquiring in fee title 3,900 acres of strategic industrial forestland to fill gaps between existing public forestlands managed by St. Louis County Lands & Minerals Department (SLCMD). Minnesota Land Trust ("MLT") acquired 4,376 acres of forest concentrated in four units from PotlatchDeltic Corporation ("Potlatch") in February 2021 and conveyed all of these acres immediately to SLCMD for long-term management. All lands will be open to public hunting and fishing.

These four different units include:

1. Vermilion Unit – A 702-acre unit lying northwest of Vermilion Lake and consists of red and white pine forests, stands of aspen, black spruce swamps, creeks and wetlands. The unit lies within one of the largest blocks of unfragmented areas of native vegetation in Minnesota, and has not been actively logged.
2. Chicken Creek Unit – This 514-acre unit consists of seven individual parcels located between the Cloquet River and the headwaters of Chicken Creek. This Unit is dominated by mixed hardwood forest and young aspen stands, interspersed with wetlands. Many of these parcels have been logged within the past decade.
3. Carrol Trail Unit – The 206-acre Carrol Trail Unit consists of four contiguous parcels lying west of the Cloquet River. The unit is dominated by young aspen and mixed hardwood forest interspersed with stands of pine and spruce. This unit has been logged within the past decade.
4. Breverton Township Unit – At 2,954 acres, this is the largest unit protected through this transaction. This unit borders approximately 5 miles of the upper St. Louis River near Cloquet, and is dominated by northern hardwood forest interspersed with aspen-birch-fir forest.

All of the lands purchased through this appropriation were at-risk former industrial forest lands. At the time, Potlatch was actively divesting more than 10,200 acres in St. Louis County. Minnesota Land Trust worked with its project partners, St. Louis County Lands & Minerals Department (SLCLMD) and The Conservation Fund (TCF) to

complete the transaction. The St. Louis County Board unanimously approved this project and the applicable townships and the Fond du Lac Band were notified and approved the transfer.

How did the program address habitats of significant value for wildlife species of greatest conservation need, threatened or endangered species, and/or list targeted species?

The LSOHC Northern Forest Section priorities list the need to protect larger blocks of habitat that directly border existing public forestland. The project concentrated on fee-title acquisition of strategically important land to connect, or add, large blocks of forest managed by SLCLMD. The properties were transferred to and designated as permanent conservation and included in SLCLMD's sustainable forestry portfolio. This project also preserved public access for outdoors-related recreation.

The selection criteria also sought to maintain intact forest landscapes through an analysis of ownership pattern as well as considering conservation priorities included in the State Wildlife Action Plan, MBS Sites of Biodiversity Significance and TNC Climate Change resiliency. This ensures long-term benefit to game species such as white-tailed deer, Ruffed Grouse, and woodcock. The project area also provides habitat for numerous songbirds and species listed as endangered, threatened, or of special concern including northern long-eared bat (federally endangered), moose, gray wolf, Canadian lynx, Bald Eagle, Boreal Owl, Golden-winged Warbler, big brown bat, and others.

How did the program use science-based targeting that leveraged or expanded corridors and complexes, reduced fragmentation, or protected areas in the MN County Biological Survey.

St. Louis County developed a GIS project to assist with selecting and prioritizing parcels. The initial parcel selection used spatial analysis, remote sensing, and land metrics such as adjacency to SLCLMD managed forest, land form, forest cover, landscape position and hydrology to select suitable forest parcels to include in the acquisition. Project partners then used existing, publicly available conservation data in GIS to prioritize selected parcels to best protect known existing fish and wildlife habitat and reduce fragmentation of Minnesota's northern forests. Conservation data layers included Minnesota Biological Survey Sites of Biodiversity Significance, MN Wildlife Action Plan, The Nature Conservancy's Climate Resilience, and other pertinent sources to identify important habitat areas.

This methodology assisted in identifying large, contiguous blocks of high-quality forest habitat that can be managed sustainably. No small, isolated parcels were acquired. Most Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) native to the northern forests are considered interior forest species. These species require large tracts of unfragmented forest for foraging, breeding and raising young. The project addressed the greatest threat to existing large block forests in St. Louis County: subdivision. The parcels protected through this project are no longer at risk of subdivision into smaller retail lots for residential, or other human development disturbance.

Explain Partners, Supporters, & Opposition

Minnesota Land Trust worked closely with The Conservation Fund to obtain an acceptable purchase agreement with Potlatch and to conduct the due diligence necessary to complete the real estate transaction. The Conservation Fund had extensive experience in working with Potlatch on the disposition of Potlatch's Forest lands in Minnesota. The Land Trust also worked closely with SLCLMD to make certain that the land acquired met the County's management objectives. All partners communicated with the applicable municipal townships and the Fond du Lac Band to garner the support of these parties. The St. Louis County Board of Commissioners approved the project at open public meetings. No opposition surfaced during the course of the project. Comments from the public received by MLT focused on confirming that the lands would be available for hunting after title transferred to the County.

Exceptional challenges, expectations, failures, opportunities, or unique aspects of program

None.

What other fund may contribute to this program?

- N/A

What is the plan to sustain and/or maintain this work after the Outdoor Heritage Funds are expended?

St. Louis County Lands & Minerals Department is managing the acquired lands as permanent forest lands. SLCLMD practices are certified by the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI). SLCLMD’s mission is to manage its forests for the variety of benefits they provide including healthy forests, wildlife habitat and fisheries as well as providing accessible recreational opportunities and forest products which all contribute to the viability of the local community and region.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2021 & Ongoing	St. Louis County	Monitor and manage lands consistent with forest certification and management plans.	-	-

Budget

Totals

Item	Requested	AP Amount	Spent	Antic. Leverage	Received Leverage	Leverage Source	Original Total	Final Total
Personnel	\$99,000	\$99,000	\$24,200	-	-	-	\$99,000	\$24,200
Contracts	\$110,000	\$110,000	\$42,300	-	-	-	\$110,000	\$42,300
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$3,920,000	\$3,920,000	\$3,869,000	-	-	-	\$3,920,000	\$3,869,000
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$300	-	-	-	\$5,000	\$300
Professional Services	\$35,000	\$35,000	\$26,700	-	-	-	\$35,000	\$26,700
Direct Support Services	\$26,000	\$26,000	\$6,500	-	-	-	\$26,000	\$6,500
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$10,000	-	-	-	\$10,000	\$10,000
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$4,205,000	\$4,205,000	\$3,979,000	-	-	-	\$4,205,000	\$3,979,000

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Land Protection staff	0.25	3.0	\$24,200	-	-	\$24,200

Direct Support Services

How did you determine which portions of the Direct Support Services of your shared support services is direct to this program?

The Minnesota Land Trust determined our direct support services rate in a process that was approved by the DNR on March 17, 2017. The rate only includes allowable direct and necessary expenditures that are not captured in other line items in the budget. This DNR approved rate is only applied to personnel expenses to determine the total amount of direct support services.

Explain any budget challenges or successes:

The Land Trust was able to acquire the parcels available for the funding that was available. Acquisition costs (personnel, travel, professional services and contracts) were all below expectations, resulting in just over \$200,000 remaining at the close of the grant.

Total Revenue: \$0

Revenue Spent: \$0

Revenue Balance: \$0

Of the money disclosed above, what are the appropriate uses of the money:

- E. This is not applicable as there was no revenue generated.

Output Tables

Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland (AP)	Wetland (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	Forest (AP)	Forest (Final)	Habitat (AP)	Habitat (Final)	Total Acres (AP)	Total Acres (Final)
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	3,900	4,373	0	0	3,900	4,373
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	0	3,900	4,373	0	0	3,900	4,373

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland (AP)	Wetland (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	Forest (AP)	Forest (Final)	Habitat (AP)	Habitat (Final)	Total Funding (AP)	Total Funding (Final)
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	\$4,205,000	\$3,979,000	-	-	\$4,205,000	\$3,979,000
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	-	\$4,205,000	\$3,979,000	-	-	\$4,205,000	\$3,979,000

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro / Urban (AP)	Metro / Urban (Final)	Forest / Prairie (AP)	Forest / Prairie (Final)	SE Forest (AP)	SE Forest (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	N. Forest (AP)	N. Forest (Final)	Total (AP)	Total (Final)
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3,900	4,373	3,900	4,373

Fee w/o State PILT Liability													
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	3,900	4,373	3,900	4,373								

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro / Urban (AP)	Metro / Urban (Final)	Forest / Prairie (AP)	Forest / Prairie (Final)	SE Forest (AP)	SE Forest (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	N. Forest (AP)	N. Forest (Final)	Total (AP)	Total (Final)
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$4,205,000	\$3,979,000	\$4,205,000	\$3,979,000
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$4,205,000	\$3,979,000	\$4,205,000	\$3,979,000

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

87,133 feet (16.5 miles)

Outcomes

Programs in the northern forest region:

- Forestlands are protected from development and fragmentation ~ *Northern Forestlands are protected to promote healthy and diverse forests, keep water clean and help maintain healthy wildlife populations This project permanently protected the plants, animals, natural communities and wildlife habitats found in the forests, wetlands, and shorelines of approximately 4,373 acres of at-risk land with fee title acquisition. The project permanently restricted incompatible land uses such as development, subdivision, land conversion or other activities that would damage those features. The project will prevent habitat loss, habitat fragmentation and associated wildlife population declines associated with development and fragmentation.*

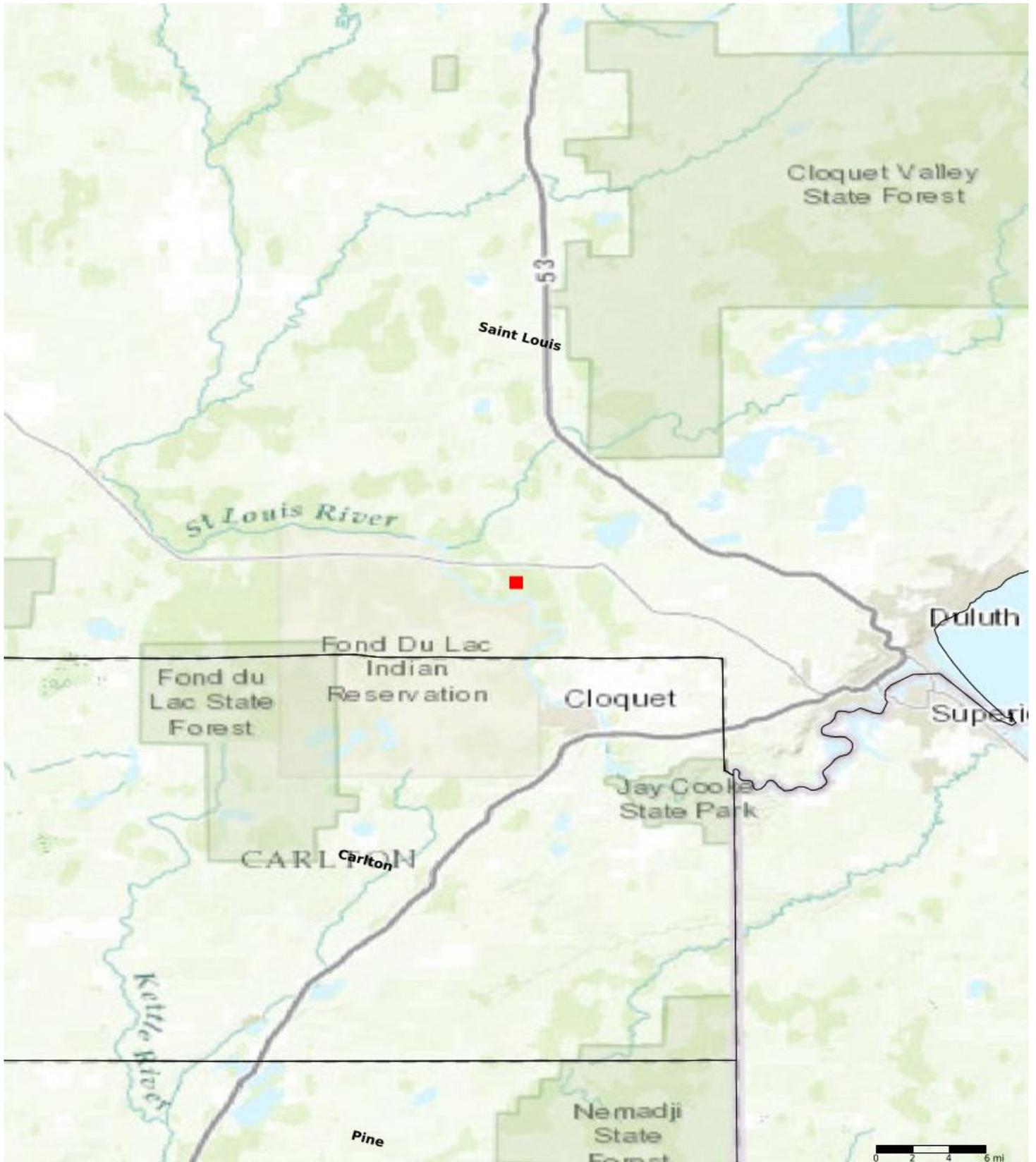
Parcels

Sign-up Criteria?

No

Protect Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Northern Forest Habitat Conservation	St. Louis	05017209	4,373	\$3,979,000	No



- Protect in Easement
- ▲ Protect in Fee with PILT
- Protect in Fee W/O PILT
- ★ Restore
- ✕ Enhance
- ⊕ Other

Parcel Map
Northern Forest Habitat Conservation
(Data Generated From Parcel List)